

Alpheus S. Bean—Dominant Influence of West Bethel Village

Alpheus S. Bean (1845-1899)



By the mid 1890's, Alpheus S. Bean was possibly the wealthiest man in Oxford County. He owned twenty thousand acres of timber land in the general West Bethel

area. His business operations consisted of seven mills, four run by steam and three by water power. Five of these mills manufactured birch spool stock and two were saw mills. Besides timber for his own mills, in one winter he had cut four million feet of timber. Two million feet were shipped to Scotland and eight thousand cords of pulp wood was sent to the Rumford Falls paper mill.

A.S. Bean obviously employed a large number of men. He had a number of houses built for employee housing in West Bethel village near his store and post office. Besides lumber operations Mr. Bean of necessity owned several large



A.S. Bean's 50 by 125 foot barn built in 1890. It faced Route 2 approximately opposite the rail depot.

farms to raise hay feed for the necessary large number of horses used for timber harvesting. Hundreds of tons of hay were harvested annually from three hundred acres.

Besides the rental houses, Mr. Bean owned a store, a hotel and a huge barn all located in West Bethel village. He had been appointed Post Master for West Bethel October 19, 1871 and held the appointment through changes in national administrations.

Alpheus Bean was born February 18, 1845 in West Bethel. His parents were Daniel F. Bean and Polly Patch Bean. According to Mr. Bean's biographic profile he attended the West Bethel district schools and as a young man went into the egg and poultry business then briefly took up merchant trading in West Bethel. A year later he went to California but after six months returned to West Bethel and bought the village store which he continued to operate until his death.

He married Lucinda E. Mason of Gilead November 14, 1871. They had no children. After the death of his father in 1893, the Alpheus Beans moved to the large farm of his parent's known as Birchmont. His county biographic profile included comments about the Bean's improving the area containing a "charming little pond at the foot of Pine Mountain developing it into a beautiful summer resort".

In May 1890 foundation construction was started for Mr. Bean's new barn which would require 250,000 feet of lumber. A month later the foundation was completed and timber work begun. Barn dimensions were 50 by 125 feet.

Besides his barn, the other most no-

ticeable “Bean” building in West Bethel is the Union Church. The West Bethel Union Church stands today and is still active.

By September 1896 the West Bethel Chapel Aide Society had raised enough money to break ground for a new church. Alpheus Bean had made a “large donation”, reported later to be of \$7,000 value. The church was completed and dedicated October 16, 1897. Mr. Bean’s large contribution to the Chapel Aid Society carried the condition that the new church must be a strictly Union Church and that people of all Christian denominations must be accepted

Alpheus Bean contracted Bright’s disease (a kidney disease) and died at his home September 20, 1899.

Sources: Oxford County weekly newspapers and the Oxford County Biographical Review of Mr. Bean., Bethel Historical Society collections



West Bethel Union Church, 1897